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Chair

The Honourable Robert Nault

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.)): Welcome to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we have this meeting with a delegation from Moldova.

It's my pleasure to welcome His Excellency Tudor Ulianovschi, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, to the committee. Also at the table with the minister is Igor Bodiu, head of the American division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. Of course, we have our good friend the ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to Canada, Her Excellency Ala Beleavschi.

Welcome to the committee, everybody.

One of the things we have been doing, Minister, is inviting foreign ministers and dignitaries to the foreign affairs committee. It gives us a direct opportunity to allow you, on behalf of Moldova, to let Canadians know your priorities and, obviously, the connection to Canada as a nation.

It's our pleasure to welcome you.

Colleagues, we have a pretty tight schedule this afternoon, as the minister has other engagements that need to be dealt with, so we'll move this along as precisely as your chair can. Obviously, we will leave time for questions from you as members.

Before that, we would like the minister to take the floor with some opening comments; we'll do that now.

Minister, the floor is yours.

His Excellency Tudor Ulianovschi (Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova): Thank you so much.

Mr. Chair, vice-chairs, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, I am truly honoured to speak today before this esteemed committee, the foreign affairs committee, which is very dear to any minister of foreign affairs.

Let me first and foremost express my sincere gratitude to Chairman Robert Nault for the opportunity to be here today and for his personal commitment to support young democracies faced with multifarious challenges in their pursuit of an independent path, free of external coercion and pressure. Who would have thought that almost three decades ago since gaining their independence, some of these countries would still have to struggle for their territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty, and that instead of focusing on economic transformations and building functional democracies, they still continue to be exposed to multiple threats to their sovereignty, independence and, most importantly, their national security? I am therefore pleased to be here today to share with you some of my thoughts about the security landscape in our region and the security challenges that my country, the Republic of Moldova, is facing today.

We are all witnessing the complexity of contemporary change. The current security environment is influenced by continuous transformations that generate new risks and also new threats. These challenges push for redefining a traditional concept of security, while the security agenda must be focused on new ways of addressing asymmetric and non-conventional threats that require new types of international and regional solidarity.

Wedged between Romania and Ukraine, and lying in the lowlands of southeastern Europe, my country's geographical position was thought to represent a bridge between the west and the east, yet the outbreak some 26 to 27 years ago of an armed conflict in the eastern region of Moldova, the Transnistria region of the Republic of Moldova, posed a serious threat to both national and regional security. This threat is being fuelled by the outbreak, almost simultaneously, of other conflicts throughout most of the former Soviet republics, the Ukraine being the most recent one.

Today the breakaway region of Transnistria is home to about 1,400 Russian troops and more than 20,000 tonnes of ammunition, most of which date back to the Second World War. The outbreak of the conflict and the foreign military presence in the territory of my country continuously generates tensions, and as such poses a risk of escalating confrontation. Foreign military presence constitutes a serious obstacle to a peaceful resolution of the conflict and the territorial integrity of my country, as it contributes to the preservation of the conflict situation by encouraging the destructive forces to keep on promoting their secessionist plans.

Furthermore, the Transnistrian conflict continues to impact negatively Moldova's overall political, economic, and democratic development. In addition, a general state of uncertainty as to what the country's future would be like generates distrust of large groups of the population and the democratic transformations they have been aspiring to. It polarizes the society and forces an outflow of the population from my country.

Over the last few years, the Russian Federation's operational group has intensified its military exercises, conducted jointly with the Transnistrian paramilitary forces, in blatant violation of the ceasefire agreement signed in 1992. Besides that, the Russian Federation continues to enlist recruits from among the local population into its army, and has launched a massive campaign of handing out Russian passports to the region's population in its attempt to stretch out abroad the so-called Russian world.

● (1540)

The Moldovan government has consistently advocated for an unconditional and complete withdrawal of Russian troops from our territory, as their stationing is not based on any legal framework or any consent of the host country. Despite the fact that the Russian Federation has repeatedly committed itself to withdrawing its troops from this region and respecting Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity, it has constantly defied common sense.

It is therefore my particular pleasure to voice today from this important rostrum my government's great appreciation of the solidarity Canada has shown towards Moldova's endeavours to promote, for the first time in our independence history, a UN General Assembly resolution on the complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military forces from the national territory of the Republic of Moldova.

Canada has taken a decision to co-sponsor our resolution, thus becoming the first country in the world to do so. This move not only shows Canada's consistent and unequivocal stance on the importance of strictly abiding by the principles of international law, of the Charter of the United Nations, and of the rules-based world order, but we also see much symbolism in this decision. A higher degree of political dialogue has developed between Moldova and Canada.

Another important milestone achieved in our co-operation is about to occur today in the upcoming signing of the bilateral agreement for the promotion and protection of investment within the Republic of Moldova and Canada, as well as a joint declaration on progressive and inclusive trade and investment. It will send a strong signal to both of our business communities about the openness and guarantees of our markets for mutual and beneficial co-operation.

It is important to remain committed to the reform agenda undertaken by my country under the association agreement signed with the European Union in 2014. The Moldovan government is well aware of the importance of domestic reforms.

I see here two most critical strategic goals. One is a profound systemic modernization of the country by embracing democratic values, and ensuring the rule of law and an independent judiciary. The other is encouraging free entrepreneurship; supporting micro, small, and medium enterprises; and continuously investing in training, research and development, and education as key factors in sustainable economic growth.

Concurrently, restoring mutual trust between both banks of the Dniester River, showing the population of the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova the benefits of a closer co-operation with Europe, combined with a clear strategic direction of development and a European integration perspective for the country can bring those deliverables that are so much needed in the society.

With the Russian troops stationed in the Transnistrian region, which stretches over 400 kilometres along the western border of Ukraine and Moldova, and having an ongoing conflict in the Ukraine's eastern region of Donbass, the security and stability of both Moldova and Ukraine are much intertwined.

It is therefore of paramount importance for the two neighbouring countries to work closely towards more efficiently addressing these threats. The Moldovan government continues to support Ukraine in its effort to overcome the crisis in Donbass and to solve the Crimean problem through political and diplomatic means in order to restore peace and regain Ukraine's full sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Republic of Moldova condemned the annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation, and supports Ukraine's efforts to resolve the separatist conflict in Donbass based on the Minsk accords. A good example of such co-operation is the joint control of the Transnistrian segment of the Moldovan-Ukrainian border crossing point launched last July. In the near future, we intend to move to the final stage of taking full de facto control over the common border.

It was last Saturday that the parliaments of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, together with the speakers, created a joint parliamentary assembly. A new and only platform was called to unite our forces to collectively address common threats to national and regional security, as well as to strengthen co-operation and further advance the reform agendas.

● (1545)

Having a more advanced dialogue with the European Union through the implementation of the association agreements, these three countries—Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia—aspire to full-fledged membership of the European Union. As in the case of Georgia and Ukraine, Moldova has already made its strategic choice: European integration. This is not merely an option for our country, it is a vital necessity. We hope that in this important, and without exaggeration, crucial time for our countries, our partners, and friends —the European Union, Canada, and the U.S.—will show their solidarity and support.

We therefore warmly welcome recent signals from Canada about its openness to viewing our three countries through a single regional lens and to adopting, accordingly, a common regional approach. I wish to assure you of my government's willingness and full commitment to engage more actively together with you in this important endeavour.

I should stop here to allow for more time for our communication.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ulianovschi.

I'm going to start right off the bat with Mr. O'Toole, please.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Thank you very much, Minister. Welcome to Canada. Thank you for spending some time with our committee. I'm the vice-chair of the committee and the Conservative Party shadow minister for foreign affairs.

What is interesting is that our committee met with a delegation from Ukraine this morning, and many of the challenges with respect to Russian aggression—a frozen conflict, some of the need to further stabilize democratic institutions, and a free enterprise environment—are the same, except for one thing that Ukraine is quite clear about, and that is their desire to join NATO.

In your case, I know that Moldova is part of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, but in recent years you have committed troops to NATO-led engagements in Kosovo and elsewhere. Where would you like to see your country's plans with respect to joining the NATO alliance?

The Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Tudor Ulianovschi: Thank you so much, Mr. Vice-Chair, for drawing this line of similarity between Moldova and Ukraine.

According to our constitution, Moldova cannot join a military alliance, including NATO. However, we have excellent co-operation between the Republic of Moldova and NATO. A year and a half ago we opened a NATO liaison office for the first time in Chisinau, the capital of the Republic of Moldova.

Even though there was some political debate about a neutral country having a NATO liaison office, this initiative was very strongly supported by my ministry, the government, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova. At this point there are no more debates, and the activity, the raising of awareness about the extraordinary co-operation we've have so far, and the potential to expand it, are extremely positive.

As you mentioned, Mr. Vice-Chair, the Republic of Moldova has been actively participating in peacekeeping operations. We have a special battalion at the Ministry of Defense, the 22nd battalion, for peacekeeping operations. And by the way, women and men are members of the battalion. I am a strong believer in a gender-balanced approach, including in peacekeeping operations.

We have expressed our interest in further participating in other peacekeeping operations. The upcoming one I think is in Mali, and I have had extensive conversations with our Minister of Defense to participate in Mali.

The priorities for the MOD in the Republic of Moldova in connection with NATO as an organization, but also with its member states, is to strengthen the capacity of the military in the Republic of Moldova to be more specialized, to be seamlessly integrated into NATO standards. That is why in the recent visit by the Minister of Defence of Romania, a neighbouring country of the Republic of Moldova and a NATO member, a decision was taken that Moldovan troops would participate in a joint Moldovan-Romanian battalion in peacekeeping operations as well. The target is to increase the standards of operations and to integrate the SOPs preparation level of the Moldovan military.

On the other hand, it is also the priority right now to strengthen the capacity of the Moldovan military in the cybersecurity field, and to work with centres of excellence in Italy, and also in Riga, if I'm not mistaken. The purpose is to be able to respond to the new security threats and challenges, including elements of hybrid war techniques, and that includes cybersecurity because Moldova is exposed to those threats, being one of the top 10 or top 12 countries in the world with the fastest Internet speed and widespread Internet usage. We need to have these certain elements to prevent a cyber-attack.

● (1555)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Do I have any time?

The Chair: Shorter answers, shorter questions....

Hon. Erin O'Toole: I found that very interesting, Minister. Thank you very much for your comments on the constitutional neutrality.

When you deploy the 22nd battalion in a NATO-led effort, I guess that would be a result of votes in your national assembly justifying the use of troops. If it's a NATO-led mission and Moldova is neutral, how do you square the circle between your constitutional requirements and a parliamentary role over defence oversight?

Mr. Tudor Ulianovschi: The Moldovan parliament supports the participation of Moldovan troops in peacekeeping operations in non-military actions, so there is full support for MOD from the parliament and the relevant committees. We have not registered any disagreement with relation to Moldovan neutrality. We don't think this contradicts neutrality. On the contrary, this works to strengthen the capacity of the Moldovan military.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, please.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Just before I start I'll pass the floor to Ms. Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Yes, thank you.

Thank you very much, Minister, for being here, and welcome again to the ambassador, who's no stranger to our Parliament.

Since your independence, the international community, Canada included, has provided technical assistance in terms of your transition to democracy. In 2014, Canada sent 20 election monitors through OSCE. We've also provided expertise in terms of budget accountability, and in a number of other areas. It's actually quite impressive how far Moldova has come in terms of its democratic transition.

There's one area I want to ask you about. We have just returned from question period in the House of Commons, and our Prime Minister answered all of the leaders' questions. On Wednesdays, in fact, he answers all of the questions in a designated Prime Minister's question period. Is there any consideration of having a similar kind of thing in the Moldovan parliament?

Mr. Tudor Ulianovschi: Thank you for the question.

Do you mean inviting the Prime Minister, or—?

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: For a designated Prime Minister's question period in parliament?

Mr. Tudor Ulianovschi: Every week, we have a so-called government hour. Based on the requests of MPs, certain ministers will come, depending on the topic, and, if necessary, the Prime minister will also participate. For example, recently, following the meeting May 3 meeting of the EU-Moldova Association Council, the Prime Minister was invited by a parliamentary group to report on the decisions and follow up on that meeting.

We are no strangers to this practice. On the contrary, this is being applied in Moldova.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Minister, it's a tremendous pleasure to see you and to have you come to Canada, and to speak about Moldova. It's an amazing situation.

Today the world talks about hybrid warfare. We realize that for the North Atlantic alliance, Russia poses the most significant of threats.

You've been living all of this for over a quarter of a century. These were the testing grounds in many ways for future exploits of the Kremlin, and it's fascinating that you have survived. I think I speak on behalf of everyone when I offer you our congratulations on being able to maintain a democratic, rule of law, free enterprise state, of course with tremendous difficulty, and not without flaws. However, when you compare the situation in Moldova with the current situation in Transnistria, Moldova has democratic values, and Transnistria is a gangster state. Moldova has the rule of law. In Transnistria, the judiciary is used as a weapon of suppression.

You talked about the entrepreneurship in Moldova. Transnistria is a black hole in Europe. With the laundering through Transnistrian banks of monies, the business of drug trafficking in Europe, the business of arms trafficking, and worse, sexual trafficking, human trafficking, Transnistria has become a black hole on the European continent when it comes to these particular issues.

How can we further strengthen the borders around Moldova—because you spoke of that—but also, how can we strengthen the sectors to prevent the money laundering of this gangster state?

● (1600)

Mr. Tudor Ulianovschi: Thank you for expressing your view.

The Transnistria region is part of the Republic of Moldova because Moldova is a unitary sovereign state. No country in the world recognizes the statehood or the independence of this secessionist region. On the contrary, we now have excellent co-operation with Ukrainian border police, the intelligence community, and colleagues working in law enforcement with a view to strengthening full control over the entire border between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, which includes the 440 kilometres of the Transnistria region's border with Ukraine.

We have set up the so-called EUBAM, European Union Border Assistance Mission, in which I'm sure Canadian officers participate as well. Canada has provided assistance to Moldova on border security, border police, using former border guards. I would encourage more technical assistance being provided for equipment or technical materials, but also training of border police to ensure that the border between Moldova and Ukraine is secure and transparent.

You mentioned the trafficking of persons. I am the chair of the national committee on fighting trafficking of persons. That's a top priority for us. To prevent that we need to have full control of our borders. Targeted assistance for border control is extremely important.

The Transnistria region of Moldova benefits from every international agreement that the Moldovan government takes part in. For example, with EU integration, we have the deep and comprehensive free trade agreement and are visa free. Automatically these advantages and free trade are offered to the businesses in Transnistria. Now we have a situation where 78% of the businesses from the Transnistria region of Moldova export to the EU. It's soft power; it's opening the borders and making people and businesses in this region understand that they are better off in united Moldova, and that they will benefit economically and socially and democratically by being part of Moldova and by engaging Europe and the west as well.

You referred to hybrid warfare. Indeed, we have survived, and I think we have become stronger, at least mentally and in terms of maturity, by being fully aware of the fact that there is foreign interference in our elections, our media, our social media, and other areas as well. We are ready to engage with other western colleagues and to share the lessons learned because, unfortunately, we have been exposed to that. At this moment, we also need support to be able to respond to the new challenges of cybersecurity and cyber-warfare because this requires some new technologies as well.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

We're going to Madame Laverdière, *s'il vous plaît*.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, sir.

H.E. Tudor Ulianovschi: You may speak French if you wish.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Okay. That's wonderful.

H.E. Tudor Ulianovschi: I will still answer in English though, if you don't mind.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Of course.

Thank you for giving us some of your time this afternoon.

Your testimony is most interesting and I am sure it will help the entire committee.

I also have a question as a parliamentarian.

How are the people of Transnistria represented in the Parliament of Moldova?

H.E. Tudor Ulianovschi: That is a very clear question.

[*English*]

Until now, the Transnistria region of the Republic of Moldova did not have special members of Parliament representing this region. At the end of this year we'll have parliamentary elections. For the first time in history, we've adopted a new electoral code with a mixed system.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Okay.

[*English*]

Mr. Tudor Ulianovschi: Forty-nine per cent will be party lists and 51% will be constituency voting. For the first time we have two new elements.

First, the Transnistrian region of Moldova will have three members of Parliament voted from that region who will represent the interests of the region. We would like to engage them to speak about the issues, but also to help them to participate in public life.

Second, we have for the first time provided three mandates of Parliament for the Moldovan diaspora abroad. This is a novelty for Moldova. Also, North America will have one MP in the Moldovan Parliament. This is something that we will do as well.

Just to reply quickly with regard the law and Parliament, I didn't mention that we have adopted this year an anti-propaganda law in Moldova as a means to protect us. I forgot, but I would just point that out here.

Quickly, to respond to your question, no, until now we didn't have MPs from the region, even though some of our MPs were born there know the issues. Now we'll have for the first time elections that will allow representation from the Transnistrian region of Moldova.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, sir.

H.E. Tudor Ulianovschi: You're welcome.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I think Canada could learn from you, from your mixed electoral system, and the speed of your Internet service. We could exchange information.

You also mentioned that Moldova would like to become a member of the European Union.

What steps do you have left? How do you see the required process to become a full member?

Thank you.

H.E. Tudor Ulianovschi: Thank you also.

[*English*]

Very clearly, the main foreign policy priority of the Republic of Moldova is to join and become a member of the European Union.

Second, I don't think we have to speak about any EU enlargement fatigue, because we have positive developments between the European Union and the western Balkans. We see that very clear signals are being sent from Brussels and all the EU member states to the western Balkans providing a clear integration perspective for them with deadlines and timelines.

For the Republic of Moldova, I would be diplomatic and not reply to your question too concretely because, of course, I am clearly pro-western and pro-European. I wish my country had joined yesterday, as we say, but we're not yet prepared. We have to prepare the country internally with reforms, democracy, and implement the association agreement with the European Union, which is a road map for preparing Moldova to become eligible. I would like to say this in reply to you, though. As a country that has an association agreement, a free trade agreement, and a visa-free agreement, we would like to request that a clear perspective of European integration from the European Union be provided to Moldova, to Ukraine, and to Georgia. This is what I would like to obtain. We will fight to obtain this perspective, for the window to be open. Then we'll be able to climb into and enter the window.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Laverdière.

We're going to take a minute to hear from Ivan Krulko, the co-chair of the Ukraine-Canada parliamentary friendship group, who has a statement to make and some comments about the relationship with Moldova.

Ivan.

Mr. Ivan Krulko (Co-Chair of Ukraine-Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group, Parliament of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada)): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, it's a pleasure for me to be here and to have an opportunity to talk again with the members of the committee.

Mr. Minister, it's a pleasure for me to be here with you.

This is the first visit of the Canadian-Ukranian friendship group to the Parliament of Canada.

Of course, we are neighbours, Ukraine and Moldova, and we understand very well that Russia is not only a problem for Ukraine or a problem for Moldova, but a global challenge and global problem. The conflict in Donbass and Russian aggression in Crimea continue the pattern of regional aggression by Russia. Moldova can't control part of its territory in Transnistria because of Russian military forces inside Moldovan territory. This is the reality.

We have a good relationship with Moldova, and Ukraine supports Moldova in the restoration of her territorial integrity. We are together in an eastern partnership with the European Union, and we are together in the regional international organization GUAM, comprising Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. It is headquartered in Kiev in Ukraine.

Of course, I would like to inform the committee that last year in Kiev we established a new inter-parliamentary organization between our parliaments. The name of this organization is the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, and this is a good opportunity to have a new possibility for our parliamentary relationship.

Thank you for your co-operation, and let's hope that Moldova will restore its territorial integrity, and that Ukraine will restore its territorial integrity as well.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Krulko, for that statement.

Colleagues, as I understand it, the minister has a very important engagement with Minister Champagne, so, Minister, we'll give you a few minutes to wrap up, if you like, to say a few words to the committee. Then we'll let you go on your way with what is considered to be a very important engagement and signing ceremony with our government.

I'll turn the floor back over to you.

Mr. Tudor Ulianovschi: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much to your colleagues for the interest and support.

Interest means understanding, and understanding means support. It's extremely important to have this support because, indeed, the region is facing the same challenges and the same threats, but also has the same aspirations. These aspirations should be sustained not only by very clear support on the ground, but also by political support by sending the right signals to the world through various international organizations. Canada has been, and I'm sure will be, a leading voice that will encourage others to come out to speak in favour of our countries, and all the principles of law.

The Republic of Moldova has very good co-operation with Canada. I would say it's excellent. We are at the highest level of our bilateral co-operation. The fact that today I have the honour of signing the FIPA, the foreign investment protection and promotion agreement, will further strengthen this co-operation, especially on the economic side, and provide guarantees of investment opportunities and businesses from Canada to invest in Moldova, and the region as well. We have to connect politically, economically, and people to people. I think that only together will we succeed.

I do applaud you for coming out and supporting the torch that we are handing to you with full humility. I am sure that our future will be one without foreign troops and secessionist movements, with countries fully enjoying their territorial space, their sovereignty, and being truly independent and able to resist any foreign interference and, honestly, but directly, promoting their own decisions with regard to their own view of how their country should develop and what their foreign policy priorities are.

I thank you so much for this opportunity. I look forward to further co-operation and discussion.

I would like to thank you, Mr. Chair, for your personal contribution and support, and, of course, I would like to invite Your Excellency, vice-chairs, and their colleagues to come to the Republic of Moldova. We have a very dynamic parliament and a very dynamic friendship group that is also ready to undertake a visit perhaps this fall to Ottawa, but I also think these visits should be reciprocal.

Thank you so much.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. It's been an honour to host you. I'm looking forward to further dialogue and opportunities. We're excited for your announcement today with Minister Champagne and are looking forward to you becoming a member of CETA at some point in the second round. That would be the way it should be proceeding as you enter the European Union. Thank you on behalf of this committee, and good luck. We hope to be in Moldova at some point on our way to Ukraine.

As Borys always says, there's no reason not to be in Moldova.

We're looking forward to talking about that some more as a committee.

Mr. Tudor Ulianovschi: You can come as observers to our parliamentary elections in November.

The Chair: We could do that as well.

Colleagues, we're going to take a break and allow the minister to go to the event.

Thank you for this presentation.

● (1615)

(Pause)

● (1620)

The Chair: Colleagues, we'll bring our session back to order, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), for the meeting with the delegation from Tibet.

Before us is the full delegation.

Dr. Sangay, welcome to the committee. I think we will get all of your colleagues to introduce themselves, or you can introduce them, for the record. Then we'll turn the floor over to you for opening comments. Then my colleagues will have some questions that they'd like to ask you and your delegation.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay (Sikyong, Central Tibetan Administration): Sure, I will do the introductions.

[*Witness speaks in Tibetan*]

I just felt that it was important that I say a few words in Tibetan, since I represent the Central Tibetan Administration and reflect the aspirations of six million Tibetans.

It's an honour and privilege to be here in front of this committee. I also think it's important and necessary to have a real voice here, following the recent hearing of the so-called delegation from the Tibet Autonomous Region in front of this committee.

Today I would like to say that this delegation truly reflects and represents the aspirations of six million Tibetans. From the right-hand side, or clockwise, as Tibetans usually go, we have Namgyal Dolkar, Migyur Dorjee, Pema Chagzoetsang, and Dhondup Tashi, and Van Tenpa Yarphel.

They represent the Tibetan Parliament in Exile; and Ngodup Tsering represents His Holiness the Dalai Lama and is the North America representative for the Central Tibetan Administration. He is based in Washington, D.C. As you can see, we have elected representatives of the Tibetan Parliament in Exile, and a representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in this room.

First, with regard to the the previous delegation from the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region, it's only part of traditional Tibet. Traditional Tibet constitutes Ü-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo, three provinces, and as far as area-wise, it's about 2.5-million square kilometres of land, which, in a North American context, is as big as Texas and California combined, or as large as western European countries.

Secondly, the Tibetan delegation sent by China is nothing new, as it has always been part of the Chinese government strategy to have such delegations serve as a smokescreen to the grave human rights violations that are going on in Tibet. It is basically colonial masters forcing a few natives to parrot their propaganda.

What is new is the global community falling for China's propaganda, either to appease Beijing, or selling one's morals for short-term economic gains. Hence, it's encouraging and refreshing to see the committee so courageous and moral in inviting me to speak on what is actually happening in Tibet. I must say that you all stand up for true Canadian values, for which we are very, very appreciative.

I must put my presentation in the context of saying, if you want to understand China, you must know the Tibetan narrative. If you don't understand the Tibetan side of this story, you won't understand China fully. For example, One belt, One Road is much talked about. There are around 60-something countries that have subscribed to it. Many articles have been written about the pros and cons of One Belt, One Road, but for Tibetans, One Belt, One Road reminds us of a nightmare, in the sense that the occupation of Tibet happened with one road.

In the 1950s, the Chinese Communist government promised peace and prosperity for Tibetans, if only Tibetans would help them build one road connecting China to Tibet. Hence, Tibetans did. In fact, there was a song composed in the 1950s and 1960s saying that Communist China is like parents: they shower you with gold and silver coins, if you work for them. Tibetans were actually paid silver coins to build that road connecting China to Tibet. Once that road was completed, trucks came, guns came, and tanks came; hence, Tibet was occupied. Since then the railway line has come and airports have come, all further strengthening and affirming the occupation and colonialism of the Tibetan region.

● (1625)

As you might know, 36 ambassadors of European countries have objected to the one belt, one road initiative for its lack of transparency as to how contracts are given in implementing that initiative.

The delegation from China essentially said that Tibet is free and that Tibetans enjoy freedom. Here I would note that Freedom House comes out with a report every year, a freedom index. As per the report of 2016 and 2017, Tibet is the least free region after Syria. Everybody knows about Syria, and I know in Canada it's also one of the most talked about and discussed issues, but how many Canadians know that Tibet is the least free region after Syria? Also, since 2009, 152 Tibetans have committed self-immolation. They have burned themselves.

What is forcing 152 Tibetans to commit self-immolation and burn themselves? It's an act of desperation and determination calling for freedom for the Tibetan people and the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet. This is their aspiration, but still, not many people know about these facts. Why? Again, Reporters Without Borders, as you know, a major international NGO based in Paris, issued a statement based on reports by journalists in Beijing. What they have concluded is that, for journalists, it's more difficult to access Tibet than North Korea. Now with the recent meeting and signing of an agreement between President Trump and Kim Jong-un, everybody knows about North Korea, but how many people know about the situation in Tibet? Not many. Why? Because journalists cannot go to Tibet.

The recent delegation also said that Tibet is free and that Canadian members of Parliament and government officials could go to Tibet to see for themselves, but I must report to you that even the diplomats, Canadian diplomats in Beijing, have great difficulties travelling to Tibet, let alone without any restrictions or without being accompanied by Chinese officials on every visit, determining who they can and cannot see.

These are the realities of the situation in Tibet. The situation is second only to Syria, and access is more difficult than in North Korea. In the larger context, politically or ideologically speaking, I think there's a choice in front of us and Canada too. The choice is, either you transform China to be more like you, a liberal democracy, or China will transform you. China is already transforming many countries around the world. I travel to various capitals around the world, and now the consensus is that either you try to change China or China will transform you.

There's a lot of self-censorship going on, including in European countries. There's a lot of interference in the domestic politics of many countries. If you look at the debate in Australia, in America, and in Germany, it's not just commercial investments that the Chinese companies and businessmen are making; they're now also in academia and in politics. For example, in an Australian university, several Australian professors mentioned Taiwan, Tibet, and Tiananmen Square. Chinese students are the largest group of foreign students in Australia, and some of them complained about those professors. What did the university do? The university fired those professors.

● (1630)

Now Chinese interference is very much present in academia as well, despite the fact academic freedom is what we cherish the most. But their influence and penetration in academia is also very clear. What does that say? In the larger context, as I said, either you transform China, or China will transform you. Xi Jinping at his 19th party congress made it very clear. Xi Jinping thought is socialism with Chinese characteristics, which means one-party rule, no freedom of speech, no democracy. That's what they're bringing to the table in the international forum. Either we have to accept that or we have to push back and say liberal democracy is what we cherish, and the Chinese government should also follow that direction.

The second point, environmentally also, is that Chinese president Xi Jinping and the Chinese government makes a big deal or splash in the headlines around the world that they want to lead the world on environmental matters. If you look at the track record of the Chinese government's behaviour or actions in Tibet, you see that the results are disastrous. For example, Tibet has around 123 kinds of minerals —gold, copper, uranium, you name it— and all are exploited without much concern for the local culture, local environment, and local people. For example, some estimate that 75% of the lithium in China comes from the Tibetan area. Some say 90% of the rare earth in China and around the world comes from Inner Mongolia.

Now, I think if you own a Chinese-made smart phone, you'll know they're very cheap because they use Tibetan lithium. Extraction of lithium is very complicated because you have to use a lot of heat to extract it from the rocks, but in the process you pollute the soil, you pollute water, you pollute air. The local Tibetans don't get anything paid. In the process, the land, water, and air of Tibet is polluted. When they get lithium at such a cheap rate without paying anything to Tibetans and they use it in batteries, smart phones, and other gadgets, that makes the Chinese product very cheap. Similarly, they don't pay much to Inner Mongolians when they extract rare earth. That's why the Chinese products are very cheap.

Environmentally, Tibet is the water tower of Asia. Ten major rivers of Asia flow from Tibet. You can name any of the major rivers: Indus or Sutlej for India and Pakistan, Brahmaputra for India and Bangladesh, Salween River, Irrawaddy River, and the Mekong River. The lifeline for all of the Asian countries flows from Tibet. The Yangtze River, the Yellow River, the cradle of Chinese civilization, flows from Tibet. Tibet is the water tower for 1.4 billion people—it's that important.

We've been sharing water with all of our neighbours for free. Nowadays, we have to pay to buy water in this world so we've been very generous. Unfortunately, the Chinese government sits on the water tower of Asia and controls the flow of the water tower.

Tibet also has 42,000 major glaciers at the moment, but many scientists have concluded that in the last 70 to 80 years, 50% of the glaciers have melted and disappeared. Also, NASA says that by 2100, 75% of the remaining glaciers will melt and disappear. If those glaciers were to disappear, what will happen to the water tower of Asia? What will happen to 1.4 billion people who depend on fresh water flowing from Tibet?

It's not just that. Underneath the Tibetan glaciers or the Tibetan plateau, like Canada, it's permafrost. Under the permafrost, there is carbon dioxide and methane, around 10 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. With global warming and the industrialization of the Tibetan plateau, with the cutting down of trees and all the Chinese population moving into Tibetan areas, the permafrost is melting. If it is to melt, which is 70% of the Tibetan plateau, and if the 10-million tonnes of carbon dioxide is released, then I think global warming as we know it will be very different. If 10-million tonnes of methane is to be released, which is 30 times more powerful than carbon dioxide, then even if all the Canadians started walking instead of driving, it wouldn't help with global warming.

● (1635)

The consequences are disastrous for the whole world. From an environmental point of view, Tibet is a major issue not just for six million Tibetans, and not just for Asia, but also for Canada. In fact, scientists in Quebec have said that whether the winter in Canada is warm or cold is dependent on the climate changes in the Tibetan Plateau, because the jet stream over Tibet affects climates in North America, South America, and all the way to Africa. Hence, because we're short of time, I'd just like to say that ideologically or politically, and environmentally and historically, Tibet is a major issue for the rest of the world.

Let me conclude by saying that what we seek is also very reasonable. What we seek is support for the middle way approach, which is the policy envisioned by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and unanimously supported by the Tibetan parliament, that is, to seek genuine autonomy as per the Chinese constitution so that Tibet can remain within China, but that the autonomy or the rights guaranteed in the Chinese constitution be implemented. That's very reasonable, and the middle way approach does not contradict the one China policy.

Why I say this is that in 2014 and 2016 His Holiness the Dalai Lama met with U.S. President Obama. Both times, the White House issued a statement, first, supporting the middle way approach, and then in 2016, not just supporting but applauding the middle way approach, which means that the U.S. government does not see a contradiction between the one China policy and the middle way approach.

The middle way approach essentially is to seek genuine autonomy within China—not to seek to separation from China, but autonomy within China. This is a moderate, reasonable policy that is also a win-win policy for China and the Tibetan people. I hope the Canadian Parliament and government will support the middle way approach.

In a way, Canada is the ideal partner or advocate for the middle way approach or genuine autonomy, because Canada actually implements genuine autonomy in many of the provinces within Canada. Even as a friend of China, Canada can say that it implements genuine autonomy for different groups in Canada, which is the best way to maintain peace, prosperity, and stability within Canada, and in fact also strengthens the sovereignty of Canada, because many provinces of Canada enjoy autonomy as per the Canadian Constitution. On the issue of Tibet, this is a good model for China as well.

With that, I'll conclude my short remarks. I want to thank Chair Bob Nault for giving us the platform to share our thoughts on the issue of Tibet. I also want to thank the honourable members for spending their precious time on giving us a hearing on the issue of Tibet.

Thank you very much.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Sangay.

Now, colleagues, we have a good 45 minutes of opportunities to ask questions.

We'll start with Mr. Genuis, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you so much, Dr. Sangay and the whole delegation, for being with us. Welcome to our Parliament.

I have three comments or questions. I will put them to you all at once, and then I will turn it over to you to respond.

I'm not Tibetan, and I don't have very many Tibetans in my riding, but I've been drawn to be involved in support of the Tibetan community, in large part because of the nature of the Tibetan struggle. There are so many things about it that people find impressive: the peaceful, optimistic, and generous way in which you have engaged the struggle; the openness to compromise and to collaboration that is represented by the middle way approach; and also the way in which you have been preparing institutions through the government in exile, which supports the Tibetan diaspora but also demonstrates the experience of democracy and the readiness of Tibetans to take that genuine autonomy.

This is really an example to other peoples around the world who are facing occupation and seeking justice, of how to respond generously through open-handedness, through peace, and also by building institutions that demonstrate a readiness for that autonomy.

In that context, could you share a little about your institutions, the government in exile, and ways in which Canada can engage more and give more support to the government in exile?

That's my first comment, or question.

The second is as follows. I was intrigued by this idea of infrastructure as a possible tool of occupation and oppression. That's obviously not how we're used to thinking about infrastructure, but it's something we need to be sensitive to when we work on and with infrastructure projects in other parts of the world. In that context, I would like to hear your perspective on Canadian involvement in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, because that's something we have discussed and continue to discuss and debate in this Parliament.

Third, there is this myth of the Chinese government trying to pursue dramatic environmental change. Our Prime Minister at one time talked about China's dictatorship allowing them to turn their economy around on a dime and say they need to go green. You have presented us with some evidence to the contrary on that, so I would appreciate a little more from you in terms of this perspective.

Is China serious about going green, or is this a kind of branding exercise for the rest of the world, to try to improve their image? Over to you.

● (1645)

The Chair: Mr. Sangay, please.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Thank you, honourable member of Parliament, Garnett Genuis. The last time when the so-called delegation from the Tibet Autonomous Region came, you spoke very strongly and morally. That video has gone viral in the Tibetan world, so I must thank you for being an outright spokesperson, even though there are no Tibetans in your riding, which speaks volumes about you, that you are actually for justice, freedom, non-violence, and peace, as you mentioned. I do believe that one cannot say, I am for democracy, I am for human rights, I am for justice, I am for environmental rights, but then cannot speak for Tibet and the Tibetan people. If you don't speak out for Tibet and the Tibetan people, you are not for human rights, justice and freedom. Hence, we really appreciate your efforts and support for all these years.

As far as the Tibetan government in exile is concerned, as per the vision and guidance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, it is democratic in the real sense. We have a parliament, we have a judiciary, and we have an executive body. Also, the most powerful, or equally powerful, body is also the auditor general's office. They are very strict when it comes to spending. We worry more about our boarding card when we get in the plane than our passport and our bags, because if we don't have a boarding card, we don't get refunded. With $300 as our monthly salary, if you don't get refunded for a $1,500 or $1,600 airfare, that's three or four months of salary. I think it speaks volumes that the auditor general is equally powerful in an exile set-up, even though we don't have police or military or prison. What we worry about is getting noted by the auditor general's office, albeit there's no fear of going to prison. Hence, this is a labour of love. It's fully democratic. Tibetans are scattered in 40 countries, including Canada. In Toronto, Ottawa, or Vancouver, they all vote on a single day. It's counted manually locally, and the election commission in Dharamshala tabulates everything, and the result is declared. Hence, it's a democracy without borders. It's a beautiful thing.

Interestingly, in Canada voting is free and you are encouraged to vote. In Tibetan democracy, you have to pay your voluntary freedom tax. It's an oxymoron. If you don't pay your voluntary freedom tax, you don't get to vote. So from 2006 to 2016, the last 10 years, there was a 70% increase in the number of voters. Among all the democracies in the world, I think it's only in the Tibetan democracy where there's a 70% increase in voter registration. These are voters who are paying their freedom tax and then going to the electoral booth to cast their ballots. It's a beautiful thing that's happening.

Equally, we just watched the parliamentary debate, where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was addressing some of the questions. I think ours is much more polite.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: In fact, it's very odd that the members of parliament are with me here together, because in our parliament they act both as the opposition and the ruling party, so sometimes they support you and sometimes they criticize you. I hope our members of parliament will learn from your parliamentary procedures, because in our parliament, our members can ask 10 to 30 questions for 30 minutes to two hours, and we have to answer impromptu right then and there. Here I think the Prime Minister's question hour is so precious. You have one hour or two hours allocated, right? Ours is 10 days of questions. I hope our members of parliament learned something from the Canadian parliamentary procedure.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: If we have fewer questions, that's better for the executive. Also, in the true democratic sense it's very robust. We are also very proud.

In fact, you are right, many of the refugees, around 60 million refugees in the diaspora, could learn something from Tibetan democracy, and how we function. We run our own schools, we run our own monasteries, we run are own settlements, and quite successfully so. Our literacy rate for those below the age of 60 is 94%, and in India, which is the host country, the literacy rate is anywhere from 76% to 82%. Our literacy rate is higher than the host country's, better than Nepal's, better than Bangladesh's, better than that of many of the neighbouring countries, even though we are refugees and in exile. It's something we are very proud of and we are following.

● (1650)

And then you're right, infrastructure is a tool of control, absolutely. The road that the Chinese helped us build—of course, we helped them build it also—led to the control and occupation of Tibet. Hence, as you see, at the movement there's a lot of debate about the belt and road initiative and whether or not it's good for the world. As far as Tibetans are concerned, that's how we got controlled. Infrastructure is definitely used as a tool of control and occupation. Whether Canada participates in the Asian infrastructure bank or not is for you to decide; I'll not comment, but one has to be wise when it comes to dealing with China and the Chinese government.

"We need to go green" is the slogan of the Chinese government and Chinese leaders. Are they actually going green or not? I'm pretty sure that when they sell their solar panels or other things, they want to say they are going green, but they have a track record of deforestation and mining all of our minerals in Tibet, and not respecting local cultures. For example, some sacred mountains and sacred rivers are mined and fished, you see. I think you might know the case of a Mongolian activist who stood in front of trucks to protect the sacred mountains. What did the Chinese truck drivers do? They just rode over the Mongolian and killed him. They act with impunity in Tibet, and in Mongolia as well.

As far as we are concerned, we'll go green when the Chinese leaders say they are actually going green, with reservation and anxiousness. One has to be very careful.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Sangay, and Mr. Genuis.

We'll go to Mr. Virani, please.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Tashi delek.

It's a pleasure to see so many of you here, Dr. Lobsang, Ala, Pema, Ngodup, and all of the members of Parliament, both based here in north America and also based in India. It is truly a pleasure to have you here and to hear you open your statement by speaking Tibetan, which is very important and a matter of some controversy the last time we discussed Tibet at this committee.

As you know I'm the representative of a community that is the pride of the Tibetan-Canadian community. There are 7,000 constituents in my riding of Parkdale—High Park, and I take their concerns very seriously, both as their representative and also as the chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Tibet.

I wanted to ask you a number of questions. The first one I wanted to start with, Dr. Sangay, dovetails with the appearance of Pema Wangdu, who also goes by the name of Baimawangdui. He was here at the committee speaking about the situation of Tashi Wangchuk. That's the Tibetan individual who was detained in 2016 and indicted in 2017 on charges of "inciting separatism".

As you know, his alleged crime was advocating for the cultural rights of Tibetans to study in their own language. His efforts to promote Tibetan language instruction were picked up by *The New York Times*. The government of Canada, our government, requested and was denied permission to attend his trial, which took place on January 4th. After the appearance of Pema Wangdu at this committee on May 22, he was actually sentenced to five years in prison. That prompted our government to issue a statement through the Embassy of Canada in China. It says:

> Mr Tashi Wangchuk, a Tibetan language advocate was detained in January 2016 for peacefully raising concern about the lack of Tibetan-language education in Yushu County, and sentenced on May 22, 2018 to five years in prison for inciting separatism. Canada calls on the Government of China to release Tashi Wangchuk immediately and unconditionally. Canada urges the Chinese government to uphold its own Constitution and laws, and to respect its international human rights obligations. Canada supports the February 2018 United Nations Special Rapporteurs statement, which condemns the detention of Mr Tashi Wangchuk as the criminalization of linguistic and cultural rights advocacy.

Can you tell me, Dr. Sangay, what is your view of the importance of Tibetan language instruction in the Tibet Autonomous Region, and the arrest and subsequent conviction and sentencing of Mr. Tashi Wangchuk?

● (1655)

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Thank you very much for the question, Arif. I know that you've been the chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Tibet. You are doing a very good job. Your statement, and also the video, went viral.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Tibetans appreciate a lot what you have done so far, and urge you to continue to lead the support group in Canada.

I also appreciate your use of the words *tashi delek*, which mean "good wishes". Unfortunately, the Tibetan delegation from the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region could not speak in Tibetan. That speaks for itself. It's more convenient for them to speak in Chinese, the language of their colonial masters, so that they can echo or parrot what the Chinese government wants them to say; there's nothing lost in translation, so that when they go back, they don't land up in trouble.

As far as Tashi Wangchuk is concerned, essentially what he was advocating was allowed by the Chinese constitution and laws. Article 4 of the Chinese constitution clearly says—quote, unquote—minorities should not only use their own language but should be encouraged to use their own language. That's what the law says. Tashi Wangchuk was essentially saying that Tibetan schools should have Tibetan as the medium of instruction along with the Chinese medium of instruction. This is allowed and encouraged by the Chinese constitution.

For advocating that, which was covered by *The New York Times* —essentially the largest and the most influential newspaper in the world—even after the coverage and that advocacy, he was sentenced to five years in prison for simply advocating for what is legal, what is provided in the Chinese constitution.

For Tibetans, the Tibetan language is very important, because ultimately.... I'm sure that the delegation that came here...they always say that Tibetans are masters of their own region. If they are the masters of their own region, Tibetan identity and Tibetan culture are essential, but Tibetans are denied.

The Tibetan language is an essential component of the Tibetan identity. If you lose your language, you lose an essential part of who you are: a Tibetan. By discouraging the Tibetan language.... For example, the medium of instruction at the college level, the high school level, and the middle school level is Chinese. It's part of the cultural assimilation. Over time, they want to make Tibet into a Chinatown and Tibetans into Chinese, and the first thing is to discourage the Tibetan language. As you know, 98% of Tibetan monasteries and nunneries were destroyed, and 99.9% of monks and nuns were disrobed in the 1960s to prevent them from practising Buddhism or religion.

Mr. Arif Virani: Thank you, Dr. Sangay.

I want to ask another question. We also talked in the committee, about a month back, about the Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, who the Dalai Lama recognized when he was six years old as the 11th Panchen Lama in Tibet. A few days after that recognition, he and his family were taken into custody by officials of the Government of China. They have never been seen again.

Our government, the Government of Canada, has requested information about the safety and whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima on several occasions, dating all the way back to 1995. The United Nations has requested permission to visit this boy to verify his well-being. All of these requests have been denied.

Most recently, at this committee several parliamentarians raised questions to the officials from the TAR about the Panchen Lama. They confirmed indirectly that he his alive, which is a good thing, but access to him has still not been made available.

Can you tell me how the unknown whereabouts of the Panchen Lama affect the Tibetan community that you represent?

● (1700)

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Gedhun Choekyi Nyima the Penchan Lama, recognized by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, reflects the human rights situation in Tibet. At the age of five he disappeared. Next year it will be 25 years since his disappearance simply for being recognized as a religious leader. He'll be 30 years old. You can't blame him for being recognized as a religious leader by the committee appointed by the Chinese government, consisting of monks from Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, which is the main monastery of the Penchan Lama. Now his whereabouts are unknown.

The Chinese government says he wants to remain private, that he doesn't want to be disturbed. That's why they can't share with us where he is and what he is doing. If that is the case, then let his family members speak out, come out, and let them choose whether to reside in Canada or the U.S. and to speak for Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Penchan Lama. He is over the age of 18, which is when we all get the right to vote. He is an adult. Let him come out and speak of what he wants to do. Unless we see and hear him in person, we can't believe what the Chinese government says.

Essentially, the situation or the condition of the Penchan Lama encapsulates what is going on in Tibet. There is a denial of religious freedom and the basic human rights of an individual to practise his own religion and become or remain the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people.

The Chair: Ms. Laverdière, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here and for their presentations.

Dr. Sangay, thank you for such an interesting presentation.

As you can see, I have the privilege of speaking French here, my first language.

[*English*]

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: When we receive delegations, I sometimes think there are things we could learn from them. Perhaps you could give us a course on being polite during question period, since it all seems so polite in your parliament.

You mentioned the difficulties that Canadian officials have when trying to enter Tibet. It is also a great concern to us that we cannot go there.

I have one last point, which I will make briefly.

My colleague Mr. Virani asked certain questions that I wanted to ask. I thank him for that because I realize that I have five or six more questions and not enough time, unfortunately.

I would like you to elaborate on the concept of autonomy. What does autonomy mean to you?

I am a Quebecker. Quebec is a province with a slightly different system in Canada and a measure of autonomy. I would be very interested in knowing how you define autonomy.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Thank you very much for your questions. It's beautiful to hear your language. French is a beautiful language. We believe the Tibetan language is also quite beautiful, and ought to be preserved. It needs its own space in Tibet for the Tibetan people.

You are absolutely right. Going to Tibet is very difficult. Many members of Parliament have made requests. In fact, the UN's special rapporteur on human rights made the request, and the Chinese government agreed to allow him to visit Tibet. His term is ending in August, and he is actually not allowed....

That's why a bill is being moved in Washington, D.C. on reciprocity. Chinese members of Parliament and Chinese officials, journalists, and scholars, including the Tibetan delegation—those who are propagandists—can come to Ottawa, Canada. Similar access should be given to Canadians as well, though—Canadian diplomats, Canadian members of Parliament, and scholars. It's just about reciprocity. You come to our place and you are welcome, but we should also go.

Whenever the Chinese delegation comes, its members always say, "Unless you see things for yourself, you won't know what's going on. We don't trust your judgment or assessment because you have never been there." That's what they tell me all the time.

Actually, I went to Beijing in 2006. They allowed me. I was an academic at Harvard Law School. When I requested to go to Tibet, which is just a three-hour flight, they said they didn't have enough people to receive me in Lhasa. I said, "I've come to China and you have 1.3 billion people. Don't tell me you don't have enough people to receive me." Still, they didn't allow me.

I am a Tibetan. They always say, "You should go to Tibet and see for yourself. Then you will appreciate how good Tibet is," but we are all denied that access. It's very important that we insist. The Chinese are welcome in Canada, and the Canadian members of Parliament and the diplomats in Beijing should have access to Tibet as well.

As far as autonomy is concerned, what we are asking is a little less than Quebec, in fact. We are essentially saying that what is written in the Chinese constitution, as far as minorities and Tibetans are concerned, should be implemented, so that Tibetans have their own language, their own culture, and their own administration. This is what we are asking for, including education. If the Chinese government implemented its own laws, we could take that as autonomy.

In fact, we submitted a document called "Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy" in 2008. Unfortunately, the Chinese government has denied implementation of those rights. Essentially, autonomy means having a Tibetan language, culture, and education, and administration of the region by Tibetans themselves.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I am also curious to hear more about your government—your parliament—in exile. So you have a form of opposition.

I will ask you a real question as a politician.

What are the political differences between the current administration and the opposition?

[*English*]

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: The good thing is that the Tibetan Parliament acts as both opposition and ruling party. Members are all elected on a regional basis, and they mostly act as individuals, so there is no opposition party per se. Our democracy is a party-less democracy. It's based on a Buddhist notion and the practical idea that if there is a political party in a country, the political party will sometimes act more for its party interests than for national or common interests.

That's why ours is a party-less democracy. We all act in the national interest, rather than for party interests. That's the idea. It's the Buddhist way of achieving consensus in all decisions, which is very difficult. That's the basis on which we are moving forward. So far it's working. Democracy without borders is working.

Don't give ideas to members of the Tibetan Parliament to have an opposition. If there is true opposition in the government, we in the executive will be on the receiving end.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: That's very interesting.

The Chair: Mr. Virani, please.

Mr. Arif Virani: Dr. Sangay, I wanted to continue along a bit of a theme.

Hélène took one of my questions, so touché, Madam.

The issue of the reciprocation is an important one. It has been raised in different contexts by the Canadian Parliament and parliamentarians from many sides on a number of occasions. We had Mr. Pema Wangdu—again, Mr. Baimawangdui—here, and he said, "the door will only be more and more open to the outside world". He also said, "I do believe that you...have a good chance" to go "to Tibet [and] have a look at it."

I think what is frustrating is that we know there are Canadian-funded entities and Canadian-funded programs that exist in the TAR. I'll ask you two questions. Can you elaborate a bit on your response to Madam Laverdière in the context of a government, whether a Canadian government or any other government, that is having it funds delivered or is promoting projects on the ground in TAR and yet access isn't permitted...?

The second point is about the middle way approach. I'm glad you started with this at the outset, Dr. Sangay, because the more I learned about it, the more innocuous it seems, right? There are people who will characterize this as radical, revolutionary, independent, separatist ideas, and then when you understand it and read it, it is about mutual existence and mutual co-operation. It is about existing with Tibetan autonomy within a broader Chinese federation.

Like you said, it's very similar to many parts of the world, including what we have here in Canada. It's also a very peaceful initiative that was commenced by the Dalai Lama many decades before. Could you elaborate a bit on why you think the notion of the middle way has been altered or is being interpreted in ways that characterize it vastly differently from the way I've just described it?

For the last point, Dr. Sangay, could you touch on the current status of what we call the "Sino-Tibetan dialogue", that Chinese-Tibetan dialogue? You yourself mentioned that you'd been in Beijing. I understand that from 2002 to 2010 there were as many as nine different rounds of negotiations, and then those negotiations came to an abrupt halt.

Why did that abrupt halt occur? What can be done to resurrect that dialogue? Certainly, as Canadians, our diplomacy over a series of decades I think has always been about brokering dialogue between different communities on the planet. How can that dialogue be resurrected and what can parliamentarians do to help?

Thank you.

● (1710)

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Thank you for those very good questions.

You mentioned the name of the delegate who came and made the presentation, but we all must know that there are a few Tibetans who are sent around to speak on behalf of the Chinese government or parrot their propaganda. In the last 60 years, the most powerful person, even in the Tibet Autonomous Region, the party secretary of the Communist Party, has never been a Tibetan.

Even at a prefecture level or a county level, it's very rare to have a Tibetan as a party secretary. A Tibetan could be equally qualified, equally credentialed, but the post is always given to the Chinese. Hence, those who come here and speak supposedly for Tibetan people in actuality don't have power or authority in Tibetan areas.

Yes, you're right. It's not just the Canadian government and the American government that have provided funding for projects inside Tibet, but others. For transparency's sake, to evaluate and assess how the projects are going and whether they're beneficial or not, it's very important for the Canadian officials or the NGOs to go to the area and assess, but they are denied permission.

That's the tragedy: on the one hand, they accept the funding, and on the other hand, you will never know whether the project is implemented or not. It's in clear violation of international norms or of the agreement with a government that when it provides funding for projects it must see where the money is going. That is being truly denied. I think we all must push that access be given, hence reciprocity, not in terms of exact numbers—that three Chinese officials came here, hence three Canadians must go—but in terms of the idea that if you come, then we should go too.

As far as the middle way approach is concerned, you're right. I've had hundreds of rounds of debate with Chinese students and scholars. We explain to them that the middle way approach does not seek to challenge the sovereignty of China and does not challenge China's territorial integrity. It essentially means genuine autonomy, as per Chinese laws, and to remain within China. That's why the Obama administration said they supported the middle way approach: because it does not contradict the one China policy.

But the Chinese government and Chinese officials always say that the middle way approach is hidden independence, that there's something hidden, and that the Dalai Lama is always splitting.... People say that he's the most liked and most trusted person in the whole world. It's just the Chinese government and Chinese leaders who don't trust him. I say, "Don't you see that it's your problem when the whole world trusts Dalai Lama, and if you are not trusting, don't you think there is something wrong with your mindset?" Right? If you go with that mindset of distrust.... I remember saying that even if the Dalai Lama were to go to the caves of Malaya Mountains or into a submarine deep in the ocean, the Chinese government and leaders would still say, no, he's cooking up something up in the mountains, or he's cooking up something deep in the sea.

Essentially, it's the lack of trust, hence they try to spin it around and not accept the middle way as a win-win proposition, a win for China and win for the Tibetan people as well. China is becoming a world power, and you can have military power or money power, but if you want to have more authority, if you want to win respect, you must respect the fundamental rights of the Tibetan people. Unless you do that, you will not gain credibility and respect from the international community.

For China, there is a lot to gain, because Tibet is essentially a litmus test for China, and also for Canada, because China says they implement and the respect rule of law and human rights. If that is the case, then you should see the situation in Tibet and see that the middle way approach or genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people should be implemented. That's also for Canada, because Canada has true values: moral values and human rights values. If Canada is for these rights or values, then one should speak out for the Tibetan people as well.

Tibetans have been non-violent and peaceful for decades. In that sense, we have been the good guys in the whole world. Sometimes good guys don't get rewarded, but we would like some piece of a reward for being good.

● (1715)

If you look at the conflicts in Syria, or in Africa—with Boka Haram or just name it—everywhere in the whole world, they are all watching to see which model to follow: the violent ISIS model, the militant Buddhist model, the non-violent peaceful Tibetan model. If we're talking about violence and conflicts, the other conflict area will say let's follow the violent model because that gets more attention, more headlines, and more support. If the non-violent peaceful model of the Tibetan people is not supported, then essentially by default you are encouraging violence, and you are encouraging terrorism and militancy around the world.

For being a good guy, I think we deserve some attention and support as well. The fact that this committee is holding this hearing essentially is a support for the good guys, for which we are very appreciative.

As far as the Sino-Tibetan dialogue is concerned, the envoys of the Dalai Lama met with the Chinese representative for nine rounds, from 2002 to 2009. It's not as though there's no talking going on. There were talks between the envoys of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese representative, but there was no breakthrough. The final talk with the Dalai was in January 2010. For eight years there has been no dialogue between the two sides. Hopefully, with a nudge from the Canadian government leaders, there could be some breakthrough as well.

I know Canada is negotiating or talking about trade agreements. It's very important to have a trade relationship with China, but it's equally important that one must speak for human rights so the money and morals go together and one is not exchanged for the other.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sangay.

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, go ahead, please.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Doctor, for appearing before our committee.

In 1981, the Communist Party declared that the great proletarian revolution "was responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the party, [country,] and the people since the founding of the People's Republic", yet they never talked about Tibet in that rare moment of acknowledgement of the horrors of Communist Party rule.

I believe it was mentioned that of 6,200 monasteries that existed only six survived. That's less than 0.1% of thousands. Of 600,000 Tibetan monks and nuns, by 1979 virtually all had been murdered or disappeared. Often they were labelled monsters and demons, yet this policy of ethnocide seems to continue under the current regime.

In 2016, over 2,000 Buddhist monks and nuns were expelled from the largest Buddhist institute, the Larung Gar, and you referenced the desperation of Buddhist monks and nuns. One hundred and fifty have self-immolated. Buddhism is central to your identification as a people, but you also referenced that it's no longer the one road. There are now many roads. There are planes. There are trains. There is a wholesale repopulation of Tibet going on, so time seems to be of the essence.

How do you react to that particular reality? It seems as though the situation is no longer just desperate; it's almost at the point of being not recoverable. How much time is there? Time is of the essence.

● (1720)

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: The Chinese government's plan is to convert Tibet into Chinatown and through cultural assimilation make Tibetans into Chinese. That's why they are discouraging the Tibetan language in schools as a medium of instruction and so on and so forth.

Then through trains, railway lines, airports, and many of the roads, they have physical control of Tibet and Tibetan people. At the same time, the Tibetan struggle is a struggle of resilience and determination of the Tibetan people. You are absolutely right that 98% of those 6,000 plus monasteries were destroyed, and 99.9% of monks and nuns were disrobed in the 1950s and 1960s, but 60 years hence what has happened is that Buddhism is back in Tibet in private social space.

Government policy is to systematically destroy. Hence you rightfully pointed out, the Larung Gar monastery with 12,000 monks and nuns was demolished from August 2016 to August 2017 and reduced to 5,000 monks and nuns. That is further divided into two parts: one is the spiritual part and one is the academic part, as per the report of Human Rights Watch. They have stationed 200 Communist cadres to control and monitor the ins and outs of Larung Gar.

As we speak, Yarchen Gar with 5,000 plus nuns is being demolished. This is the reality. But from 98% destruction back in Tibet, Buddhist monasteries are now back. In exile, Buddhist monasteries have been rebuilt and revived and there are Buddhist centres all over the world, including in Canada. Oddly, China has become the largest Buddhist country in the world with 300 million to 400 million Chinese practising Buddhists. If there were a competition between the Dalai Lama and Mao Zedong, you can clearly see after 60 years that the Dalai Lama has won hands down.

From complete destruction, there has been a revival of Buddhism among exiled Tibetans around the world, back in Tibet, and also in China, so I am sure Mao Zedong must be thinking that he destroyed everything that was Buddhist in Tibet, but now Buddhism has come back to China in full force, so that's why it is a struggle of resilience. Tibet is non-violent and peaceful but we also have the mountain spirit of determination. Peacefully, quietly, we keep fighting step by step and we get to where we want to go.

Essentially, even though you say time might be against us, we think time is with us, because fundamentally our struggle is based on Buddhism, which is 2,600 years old and Communism is 100 years old. There is no competition between the two. If Buddhism has prevailed for 2,600 years, it will be there for another 2,500 years. With Communism gone to Cuba, with Raul Castro holding onto it, and with Kim Jong Un signing the treaty, if North Korea goes, then I think China will be the only so-called Communist country with a market economy in the whole world.

We do believe that Buddhism will again prevail and that peace will also prevail in the Tibetan Plateau, but the Chinese government's efforts at ethnocide, to essentially destroy anything Buddhist and anything Tibetan, are continuing. As well, it's also true that there is a population transfer, with of a lot of Chinese coming to the Tibetan Plateau and dominating the economy and the market. For example, in the capital city of Tibet, Lhasa, I think 80% if not 90% of shops, hotels, and restaurants are owned or run by Chinese. In fact, in the 1980s there were signboards, and the practice was also true, that they said they were hiring, and if you were Tibetan, they would give you 30 renminbi a day, and if you were Chinese they would give you 50 renminbi a day. That's essentially like having a signboard in Ottawa in a shop that said if you were Chinese they would give you $50 Canadiana day, and if you were a Tibetan or a Canadian they would give you Canadian $30 a day. That kind of blatant discrimination is still going on in Tibet.

● (1725)

This is in some ways a systematic effort to discourage and destroy the identity and very foundation of the Tibetan people in Tibet, but the resilience of the Tibetan people lives on and is still very strong. We have done it with the revival of Buddhism, and we will do it politically as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Sangay.

Colleagues, we're going to go a little over time because we want to finish the second round, so Mr. Genuis will go first and then Mr. Saini, and that will wrap it up.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to pick up on a couple of things that have been discussed so far, so I'll mention them again quickly at the beginning.

On this issue of the religious question, my sense is that we are seeing the religious suppression in China change its form, but it is still very much there. Historically it was trying to stamp out religion, and now it's the government trying to co-opt and control religion. We see it with regard to their approach to prospective reincarnation. It's the only atheist regime in the world that also wants to control reincarnation. It's like democracy with Chinese characteristics; this is reincarnation with atheistic characteristics.

I'd be curious to hear your thoughts on the ongoing suppression, repression, of religion, but in a different form.

Do you think we should be funding projects inside Tibet? I could see taxpayers wondering, if we're not even able to monitor and see the results, how do we know the money is ending up in Tibet at all. But, of course, the people of Tibet need help and face very difficult circumstances. Is there a way we can help people inside Tibet, and know that we're doing it?

And finally, I wonder if you can comment on some of the overall trends with respect to Tibet and human rights in China. There was said to be dialogue happening, but that's no longer happening. Are there other areas in which we see a worsening of the situation or in which we see positive trends? What are we looking at?

Thank you.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: As far as funding inside Tibet is concerned, I think we all must. We encourage any funding that can help Tibetan people inside Tibet. You can reach out to those villages and those communities where funding is needed, and where schools and hospitals are needed. They have to be educated and they have to be treated well, and the culture has to be preserved. For any funding that's been provided by the Canadian government or any government around the world, we always encourage and appreciate those efforts.

As for reincarnation, you're right to say "reincarnation with atheist characteristics". It's true. In 2008 the Chinese government came out with guidelines, eight-point guidelines, that say any reincarnation of a monk has to be registered and approved by the Communist Party, the district Communist Party. Can you imagine that? The stamp of an atheist party is needed for our spiritual practice and spiritual leaders. Similarly, they are planning for what we call the reincarnation of the Dalai Lamas as well, but as I told you, if you look at the track record of 98% of monasteries and nunneries being destroyed and 99.9% of monks and nuns being disrobed, and at how they call His Holiness the Dalai Lama a wolf in sheep's clothing, a devil, and all of that....

With that kind of track record, I think the Chinese government has no credibility whatsoever in endorsing or recognizing reincarnation. It's almost like Kim Jong-un recognizing the next Pope and expecting all the Catholics to say, "Oh yes, we've got the next Pope because our Communist leader recognized the Pope." That much of a lack of credibility is with the Chinese government when it comes to reincarnation. They are trying to co-opt and control religion in Tibet as well as China.

Overall, what is disturbing is that in Tibet they have imposed a grid system, or a social credit system, whereby the citizens have to give security to get subsidies. Essentially, you have to report or spy on your neighbours to get your essential subsidies such as sending your children to school or any kind of facilities from the Chinese government. They have also issued an ID card with second-generation biometric chips in it, so once you swipe it, your movements are tracked.

For example, in Lhasa, there's a check-post every 30 or 40 metres, so if anyone wants to go to the market, you have to swipe your ID card, and your movements are tracked. They now have built sophisticated software or an algorithm whereby they track the pilgrims from remote villages and nomadic areas who visit some of the places in Tibet. Once you swipe your ID card, your movements are tracked. Accordingly, they then come to a conclusion that a nomadic area or village might be problematic because most of the nomads or farmers have travelled to various places in Tibet.

That's a very, very sophisticated system. It is working so well that the party secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region was sent to the Xinjiang Autonomous Region to implement the same grid system. This is being researched and reported by Human Rights Watch and other think tanks.

Now, also in Xinjiang, that system is working so well that the party secretary of Xinjiang has been promoted in the politburo. That's the 20-member leadership of China. China has so many provinces and so many cabinet ministers that to reach the top 20 you must have done something very, very good for the Chinese government. The party secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region, now in Xinjiang, is among the top 20 because of this sophisticated system.

What is worrying for Canada—and what should be worrisome for Canada and the rest of the world—is that this software and algorithm will be sold to despots and dictators around the world. They will use that software to control their own people. The Chinese are very good at marketing and selling their products. This product will be on the market soon.

Hence, what is happening in Tibet will happen to you.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Sangay.

We're going to go to Mr. Saini, and that will wrap up our questions for today.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, all of you, for coming.

Dr. Sangay, just as a point of information for you, I was born 125 kilometres from Dharamshala, in a small town called Mandi, in Himachal Pradesh—

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Oh, yes.

Mr. Raj Saini: —which you probably know, so I'm very familiar with the presence in India.

I actually don't have a question. I have an opinion that I want to ask you about. If you look at what's happening in Tibet right now, there are certain things that are happening overtly and there are certain things that are happening subtly. When we talk about the belt and road initiative or the construction of airports, it seems to be that successively there's a greater and greater impact of China in Tibet. If you also look at the fact that two million nomads from Tibet have now been moved into the urban areas, that's another attempt to disrupt that way of life. Also, if you look at the surrounding countries, co-operation agreements have been signed to make sure that exiled groups are controlled or watched.

The question I have is this. If you look at the question of succession, it seems to me there's a diametrically opposed view. China wants to know who the successor is, and the Dalai Lama has said that is a religious question that will be solved. According to the Dalai Lama—he's now, I believe, 80 or 81 years old—that question will be answered either in his late 80s or when he's 90. But during that period of time, when, though there will be a successor, the successor is not known yet—and I know this is a very philosophical question—does China not then have more time to have a greater impact in Tibet, when there is an understanding that there will be another leader after the Dalai Lama? What is your opinion on that? You have parallel tracks: you have a religious track, where they don't know who the next Dalai Lama will be, and you have China, which is telling you that they have to approve the next successor. It seems to me that when that person emerges, there will be conflict at that point in time because China will want to know who the bona fide successor is, but that successor will not be chosen until the right and appropriate time.

● (1735)

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Thank you very much for the very good question. Also, it's good to see someone from the neighbourhood.

You're right. I think that with the infrastructure and the Chinese migration they are trying to do their best to assimilate Tibet into China, but so far it has not worked, for two reasons.

Tibet is called the Tibetan Plateau, the "roof of the world", because on average it's 4,000 metres high. It's very cold in winter. Chinese people come to Tibet during summer and have to leave Tibet during winter. Even Tibetans took thousands of years to climb from 3,000 metres to 4,000 metres, because wheat cannot grow at 4,000 metres, only at 3,000. We discovered barley, we moved up, and the yaks also came along. That's how we survived on the Tibetan Plateau. That took us 3,000 years. The Chinese will also take 3,000 years to genetically adapt to the Tibetan mountains. Only then can they survive. We have 3,000 years with us, so in that sense, it's true. Also, then, 70% of the Tibetan area is still nomadic and rural, where the Chinese infiltration and presence is much less and also very difficult. In that sense, we have some time: around 3,000 years for us, you know. It's a challenge.

In the urban areas, where there are more developments and better infrastructure, the Chinese are moving in for longer periods of time, but that's where the blatant discrimination is also happening, including in hiring and employment. Even Tibetans who have worked for the Communist Party and are loyal Communist Party members are never promoted to party secretary at the prefecture or county level, even though they are educated and credentialed people. They feel the discrimination.

For example, in 2008 just before the Olympics when there was a major protest all over Tibet, a nationwide protest, CCTV wanted a few Tibetan scholars—quote, unquote—to be on Chinese television to propagate their version of the story. They were flown from Tibet to Beijing. When they went to the hotel to check in, which was booked by CCTV, they were told, "You can't stay in this hotel because you are Tibetan, and you must stay in another hotel that is designated for Tibetans."

Similarly, even the mid-level Communist Party members, when they went to Chengdu to stay in the usual hotel, were told that they couldn't stay in that hotel, that they had to stay in another one. Even the intellectuals, the party members, feel discrimination, so you can imagine it for the people. Hence, 152 Tibetans have burned themselves, have committed self-immolation. It's an act of desperation, yes, but it is also an act of determination. After 60 years, after three generations of Tibetans, the patriotism, feeling, and passion for the cause are still very strong.

In that sense, you're right. The Chinese government is doing its best to control, but it is not succeeding, hence we have this hearing and the delegation from China that also came to try to share their version.

As far as reincarnation is concerned, as I shared with you, ultimately it is for the Tibetan people to embrace the next Dalai Lama. Obviously, the next Dalai Lama that Tibetans will embrace will be the one recognized by us or the Dalai Lama, and not by the Chinese government, given their track record. To assume that there is a rational progression where there will be two candidates and there will be conflict I think is a fallacy, because the other candidate will have no credibility whatsoever. As I said, it's almost like Kim Jong-un saying "this is my Pope and all the Catholics should follow". I doubt there would be anyone following that.

● (1740)

Mr. Raj Saini: I didn't mean two candidates. I meant the candidate that finally emerges. That person may not be acceptable. It's not that there are two candidates, but that the one person who the Dalai Lama conveys is the next Dalai Lama may not be acceptable to everyone. How would you resolve that?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: That will be acceptable to six million Tibetans. That's good for us. Even now, the present Dalai Lama is not acceptable to the Chinese government but is acceptable to us and six million Tibetans inside Tibet. That's the crux of the issue. Again, it's about Buddhism. It's about spirituality. The one recognized by the Dalai Lama will be embraced by Tibetans. Ultimately, spirituality is a matter of heart, a matter of faith. You can't force anyone's faith. You cannot buy anyone's faith. They have to believe it. It comes from the heart. For the last 60 years, Tibetans inside Tibet have had faith and loyalty to his holiness the Dalai Lama. That's why 152 Tibetans who have committed self-immolation have two slogans: restore freedom for Tibetans, and return his holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet. This is a third generation of Tibetans still asking for the return of his holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet.

At the same time, as for his holiness the Dalai Lama's vision, in 2001, he separated church and state and delegated all his political authority to elected leadership, which happened to be me and the Parliament at that time. We also have two tracks. There's a spiritual track and the democratic track. Among sixty million refugees and members of the diaspora around the world, perhaps Tibetan democracy is a role model. It's a well-practised implemented democracy that you can see. That's what we are practising.

Perhaps on this issue of reincarnation.... The U.S. Senate recently passed a unanimous resolution saying the reincarnation is the business of the Tibetan people; the next Dalai Lama will be recognized by the Dalai Lama and no one else; and the Chinese government has no role whatsoever.

If there was a similar resolution by this committee and perhaps, ideally, by the Canadian Parliament saying that spirituality is a matter of the Tibetan people and reincarnation of the Dalai Lama should be decided by the Dalai Lama, that would be a fair resolution. If that happened, it would be very good.

Our democracy is a genuine democracy. There is no Tibetan characteristic; it's a universal characteristic.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Sangay.

With that, I'm going to wrap it up today. I appreciate my colleagues letting us go over time today. I think it was well worth it to listen not only to the executive but also to the members of Parliament who are here. I have to admit it's the most polite group of parliamentarians I've ever met.

We should take note of that, colleagues, as we work our way through.

Thank you. It's been very useful. This committee will take the information we received today from you as witnesses, and a report will be forthcoming. We very much appreciate this opportunity to share dialogue with you.

Colleagues, thank you very much. See you on Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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